

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 10285

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TAGS: MARR, MILI, PARM. UK, NATO

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE BRITISH DEFENSE CUTS

REF: A. LONDON 9764 B. LONDON 9767

L. UNDER AN EDITORIAL BANNER THAT QUOTE DEFENCE STILL COUNTS UNQUOTE THE DAILY TELEGRAPH (CONSERVATIVE INCLINED) IN A JULY 3 EDITORIAL GAVE ROY MASON THE KIND OF PUBLIC SUPPORT HE WANTS -- BUT WHICH UNDOUBTEDLY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENSE WOULD BE HAPPIER IF HE COULD FIND SIMILAR SUPPORT IN THE EDITORIAL COLUMNS OF THE NEWSPAPERS WHICH REFLECT LABOUR PARTY VIEWS. THE EDITORIAL STARTS BY NOTING THE OBVIOUS "...THERE IS NO WAY OUT OF BRITAIN'S INFLATIONARY CRISIS THAT DOES NOT INVOLVE MASSIVE CUTS IN PUBLIC SPENDING...NOT ALL PUBLIC SPENDING IS OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE...IN OUR VIEW DEFENCE SPENDING SHOULD BE SPARED ALTOGETHER. INDEED THERE IS A STRONG CASE FOR INCREASING IT IF THIS COUNTRY IS TO POSSESS REMOTELY ADEQUATE ARMED SERVICES IN THE FUTURE." WHILE TNE LAST POINT IS TRUE -- IT IS WISHFUL THINKING IN TODAY'S ECONOMIC SITUATION EVEN FOR A CONSERVATIVE -- THE EDITORIAL CONTINUES "THE POINT IS WORTH MAKING, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF ITS INTRINSIC IMPORTANCE, BUT BECAUSE OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION AT WESTMINSTER. TRUE, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE LEFT IS NOT ALL-POWERFUL. BUT ITS INFLUENCE IS

STRONGER THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN BEFORE, SO MUCH SO THAT IF THE GOVERNMENT IS DRIVEN TO MEASURES WHICH THE LEFT DISLIKES -- SUCH AS LEGAL CURBS ON WAGES -- THE LEFT MAY BE IN A POSITION TO EXTRACT CONCESSIONS ELSEWHERE IN THE INTERESTS OF LABOUR PARTY UNITY. THE CRUCIAL POINT IS THAT CUTS IN DEFENCE ALREADY MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT... HAVE REDUCED OUR FORCES TO THE BARE MINIMUM IN TERMS OF FIGHTING EFFICIENCY AND INSTANT READINESS FOR WAR. FURTHER MEANINGFUL CUTS COULD WELL MAKE WHAT WE WOULD HAVE LEFT OF DUBIOUS UTILITY, EITHER IN A MAJOR EUROPEAN CONFLICT OR AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DIPLOMACY IN PEACETIME. FURTHER REDUCTIONS, THEN, MIGHT POSE THE QUESTION: DO WE WANT TO HAVE ANY DEFENCE AT ALL?" NATURALLY, THE EDITORIAL ANSWERS THIS QUESTION AFFIRMATIVELY NOTING "IT IS ALSO ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO CONTINUE TO EXPORT MILITARY HARDWARE". THE LONG EDITORIAL CLOSES ON A SLIGHTLY PLAINTIVE NOTE NOT WITHOUT A TOUCH OF NOSTALGIA BY NOTING "AMID OUR ECONOMIC WOES WE SHOULD NOT FORGET THAT OUR FRONTIER IS IN EUROPE, AND THAT WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT SECURITY AT SEA."

2. DEPSECDEF CLEMENTS DURING HIS JUNE 30 MEETING WITH ROY MASON NATURALLY TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS AGAIN THE HOPE THAT MASON WOULD BE ABLE TO PROTECT HIS BUDGET FROM ANY FURTHER CUTS AND MR. CLEMENTS REINFORCED SECDEF'S CONCERN EXPRESSED EARLIER TO MASON AT THE MONTEREY NPG THAT THE USG WOULD VIEW ANY FURTHER CUTS COMING ON TOP OF THOSE ALREADY CONTEMPLATED AS A RESULT OF THE BRITISH DEFENSE REVIEW AS A VERY SERIOUS MATTER.

RICHARDSON

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